

Westfall coma-rape victim dies at 30

By MICHAEL ZEIGLER
STAFF WRITER

Kathy is dead.
The 30-year-old suburban Rochester woman, who was raped and gave birth to a child while in a coma, has died two weeks before the sentencing of her convicted attacker, John L. Horace.

Sources said she died within the past few days at a health-care facility in upstate New York, where she had been transferred after giving birth to a son at Strong Memorial Hospital.

Private funeral sought; case led to proposed 'Kathy's Law'

The boy was born one year ago today.

Her family's lawyer, John R. Parrinello, declined to comment, citing the family's request for privacy. "I'm not going to confirm anything," Parrinello said.

Family members withheld news of Kathy's death in an attempt to have a private funeral service, unencumbered by intensive and unwanted publicity that has dogged them since her first-of-its-kind preg-

nancy was revealed more than a year ago, sources said.

Parrinello said the woman's family will continue to guard its privacy and that "anyone who attempts to get near this thing is unwelcome."

The cause of Kathy's death was not disclosed, but medical experts say people in her condition frequently succumb to opportunistic infections that their weakened bodies can no longer fight.

Her son was born with a heart de-

fect and underwent his second heart surgery on Feb. 27, the day Horace was convicted. He's living with his maternal grandmother outside the Rochester area.

A state Supreme Court jury found Horace guilty of raping and sexually abusing the woman in August 1995 at a Brighton nursing home where he worked as a certified nursing assistant. He faces a maximum of 8 to 25 years in prison when he's sentenced March 27.

The case made medical history. Never before had a woman in her condition become pregnant and given birth, physicians said.

The woman was referred to throughout Horace's trial as "Jane Doe" to protect her privacy.

But after the trial, Kathy's family allowed state Attorney General Dennis C. Vacco to use her first name on proposed legislation he dubbed "Kathy's Law." If enacted, the legislation would help protect nursing home patients by requiring

VICTIM, PAGE 8A

Victim

FROM PAGE 1A

background checks for nurse's aides.

Kathy, an honor graduate of a Catholic high school in Monroe County, was a 19-year-old student at Cornell University when she suffered a severe brain injury in an auto accident near Ithaca in December 1985. The injury locked her into an irreversible comalike condition known as a chronic vegetative state.

She was physically helpless, unaware of her surroundings, had to be fed through a tube in her stomach, and was unresponsive to any stimuli, physicians said.

In February 1995, after she had been treated at several hospitals, Kathy's family moved her to the former Westfall Health Care Center at 5901 Lac De Ville Blvd. It was there that she was raped.

At Horace's trial, Kathy's mother testified that her daughter was never able to communicate after she was injured.

But in an interview on the last day of Horace's trial, Kathy's grandfather said she seemed to respond when her newborn son was placed in her arms.

"The nurse said it was so he could bond with Kathy," he said. "She put him in her arms, and Kathy started patting him with one hand, just moving it back and forth, and back and forth. I said, 'She doesn't need to bond with him. I think she already has.'" □